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STATINTL

Secretive Servants

Richard Helms, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, recently gave a public speech about his very private work.

His appearance before a national meeting of newspaper editors was an unusual break with the CIA's policy of silence, and required presidential approval.

Helms took advantage of the opportunity, launching into a vigorous defense of his agency.

The CIA is vital to our survival as a democratic society, Helms said. He cited the agency's role in uncovering Russian missiles in Cuba in 1962. And he mentioned the necessity of accurate intelligence to bolster enforcement of any strategic arms limitation.

Helms emphasized that the CIA had no domestic security functions and had never sought any.

Thus did he attempt to answer critics who have accused the agency of blunders and unauthorized domestic surveillance.

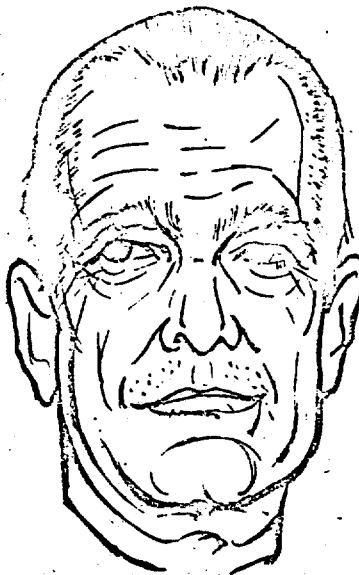
"I can assure you that what I have asked you to take on faith, the elected officials of the United States government watch over extensively, intensively and continuously," Helms said.

The problem, of course, is that the checks and balances operate out of public view. And the blunders that do occur, such as the Bay of Pigs or the U-2 incident, gain publicity, while the secret successes do not. So it is understandable that honest persons can be-

come disquieted about the vast and shadowy power held by the CIA.

But the need for intelligence and even the more clandestine operations carried on by the CIA are sadly clear in what Helms called this "fearsome world." It is naive to believe our adversaries are not engaged in the same activities.

In the end we must trust that the executive and legislative branches of government have no intention of turning the CIA into a political police force, either at home or abroad. Compelling reasons to withhold such trust have yet to appear.



Helms